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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA: DUTCH FAO SUPPORT

REF: STATE 29998

¶1. (U) Emboffs contacted officials at the Agriculture, Health, and Foreign Affairs Ministries to express support for GONL assistance to the FAO and deliver reftel talking points. Both Health and Agriculture Ministry contacts told us that UN Coordinator Nabarro visited The Netherlands in early February, during which time the Agriculture Ministry discussed ways in which the Dutch could assist the FAO in dealing with Avian Influenza (AI).

¶2. (SBU) Health Ministry officials familiar with the visit indicated that the thrust of the Dutch proposal is to provide what they called "Veterinary Fire Brigades." These would be teams of Dutch veterinarians and animal public health specialists on call to respond to outbreaks of AI. The Agriculture Ministry confirmed what the Health Ministry told us and said that the GONL would also be interested in providing longer-term assistance to support worldwide poultry farming reforms and strengthening of veterinary infrastructure. The Agriculture Ministry said that this could be accomplished through longer (multi-year) assignments of veterinarians with public health expertise to possible AI source countries. The Dutch expressed eagerness to work together on contingency planning for potential AI outbreaks and on developing a single global communications strategy for AI. In addition, the Dutch wish to encourage strong public-private partnerships to improve influenza surveillance and monitoring technology as well as develop better diagnostic tests for AI. The Health Ministry's Senior Policy Officer Philip van Dalen added that the Dutch developed expertise in bird culling during a 2003 outbreak of AI in The Netherlands that may be of help to countries dealing with the disease.

¶3. (U) Van Dalen indicated that the Dutch would also like to promote cooperation and coordination in researching vaccines for future strains of influenza. He said that the Dutch would be reluctant to see both the U.S. and EU carry out the same research twice. Van Dalen reported having direct contact with our Department of Health and Human Services and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding this issue.

¶4. (SBU) Agriculture Ministry officials stated that as AI spreads into and throughout Europe, it would become more

difficult for experts to travel outside of Europe to help other countries. However, both Health and Agriculture Ministry officials stressed that the GONL is committed to approaching AI in a multilateral way. According to Agriculture Ministry officials, this stems from the excellent inter-agency cooperation the GONL developed in controlling a 2003 AI outbreak within The Netherlands. Annemiek van Bolhuis, Director of the Health Ministry's International Affairs Department indicated that the Dutch felt that "the best prevention [against AI] is active engagement."

Arnall